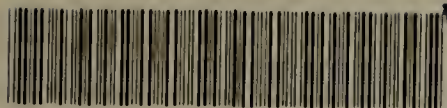


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# Effective EPRS Communications Skills

For Employees & Supervisors of Employees  
Covered by Alliance Agreement



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Developed for the  
Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
Human Resources Division



**“Effective EPRS Communication Skills”  
is being presented by the Human Resources Division  
in collaboration with the  
Alliance Bargaining Units, AFSCME/SEIU and AFL-CIO.**

**Spring, 1997**



## COURSE OUTLINE

- Overview
- The Supervision Process: Roles and Responsibilities of a Good Supervisor and a Good Employee
- EPRS Process and Performance Meetings
- A Second Chance: Performance Problems

### **Break**

- Communication Process
- Communication Styles Exercise

### **Lunch**

- Evaluating Performance
- Performance Feedback
- Reducing Differences

### **Break**

- A Second Chance Revisited: DESC Model
- Action Plan
- Wrap-up and Evaluation



## OBJECTIVES

At the completion of this training session, participants will be able to:

- Communicate in difficult situations.
- Give and receive feedback.
- Participate in effective performance meetings.
- Discuss job duties and evaluation criteria.





## THE SUPERVISION PROCESS

### PLANNING

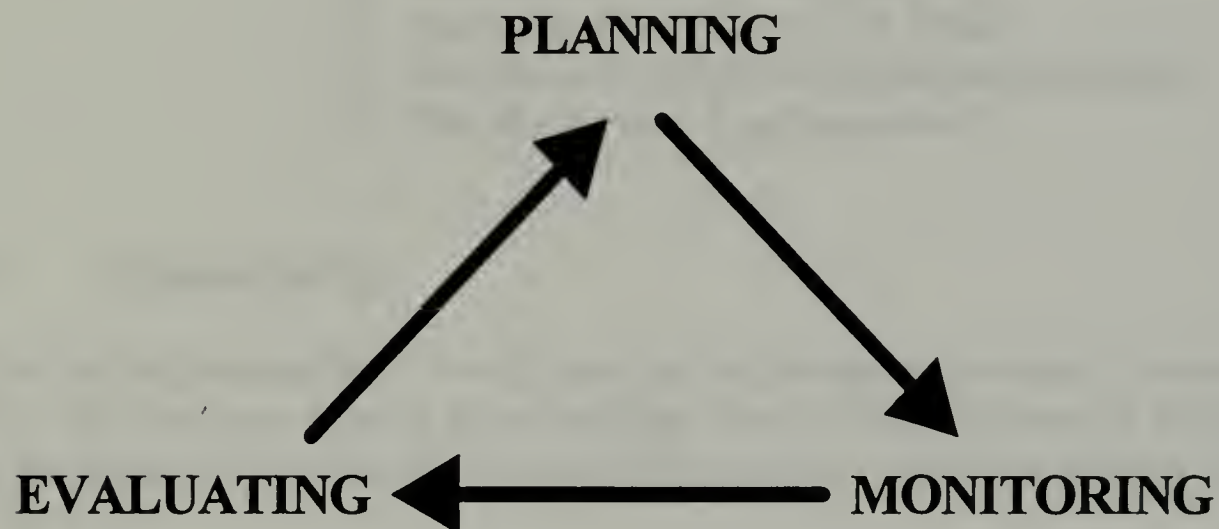
Determine what to do and divide the work.

### MONITORING

Make sure tasks are performed.

### EVALUATING

Check that work meets standards.





## **OVERVIEW OF EPRS**

### **Stage A:     Performance Planning**

EPRS is a prospective system which means it starts with Stage A, by looking ahead, not by evaluating the past. The primary responsibility during Stage A is to determine the priority Job Duties and Performance Criteria which will contribute to the accomplishment of agency goals and objectives and be used by the Supervisor to evaluate the Employee's performance. Stage A occurs in July, and should be modified within 10 days of a change in the Employee's responsibilities. Let's review the five steps of Performance Planning as outlined in the EPRS Supervisor's manual:

- 1. Review the three stages of EPRS**
- 2. Discuss the role of the Employee**
- 3. Discuss and write down job duties**
- 4. Discuss and write down performance criteria**
- 5. Sign the form and get signatures**

### **Stage B:     Progress Review**

In order for the final evaluation to be valid and fair, performance throughout the year must be monitored. The Employee must be given feedback about his/her performance, and duties and criteria must change if actual priority responsibilities change. This is the purpose of the Progress Review.

The formal Progress Review occurs in December-January or half-way through a performance cycle. This is when the Employee gets Advisory Ratings. Advisory Ratings let the Employee know how he/she is performing thus far in the performance cycle. They are an indication of what the final rating will be if performance continues as is. Formal Progress Reviews also occur when there is a change in the Employee's job title or Supervisor.

In addition to Advisory Ratings in each duty, the Employee will be given a Progress Review Summary Rating which reflects overall performance during this period. This overall rating reflects performance on all assignments, not just those related to priority duties.

The formal Progress Review is also a time to reaffirm that the priority duties continue to be the most appropriate in light of the agency's goals and the Manager's priority initiatives under the Performance Appraisal Process. If they are no longer appropriate, revise them.





Informal Progress Reviews are a part of regular supervision. They are an opportunity for the Supervisor and the Employee to share recent examples of the Employee's performance, both good and bad, and to discuss the potential impact of such a pattern of performance. These meetings are particularly important when performance might result in a rating of "Unsatisfactory" under the new Alliance contract. According to the contract, any covered Employee who may receive a final overall rating of "Unsatisfactory" must be notified at least three months prior to the final rating (e.g., generally by April 1, for those Employees who are on a full annual cycle) and told what improvements are necessary in order to be rated "Satisfactory".

The seven steps of Progress Review, as outlined in the EPRS Supervisor's manual are:

1. Meet informally with the Employee regularly.
2. Begin the mid-year review meeting.
3. Discuss and rate performance for each duty.
4. Discuss and write down ways to improve performance.
5. Discuss and rate overall job performance.
6. Update the duties and criteria.
7. Sign the form and get signatures.

#### **Stage C:     Annual Review**

The Annual Review is when the Supervisor, after consulting with the Reviewer, evaluates the Employee's overall performance for the year. Performance is evaluated on each duty and overall. The Annual Review occurs in June, or when an Employee terminates and goes to another agency. The five steps in the Annual Review, as outlined in the EPRS Supervisor's manual are:

1. Begin the Annual Review
2. Discuss and rate performance for each duty.
3. Discuss and rate overall job performance.
4. Discuss and write down and Employee development plan.
5. Sign the form and get signatures.



**CHECKLIST FOR PERFORMANCE MEETINGS****Supervisor****Employee****1. PREPARE FOR THE REVIEW**

- Review employee's performance.
- Gather documents.
- Prepare an agenda.
- Review own performance.
- Gather documents.
- Prepare points you wish to make.

**2. BEGIN THE REVIEW**

- Explain the purpose and importance of the meeting.
- Review the agenda for the meeting.
- Highlight the procedure and check for understanding.
- Ask clarifying questions.

**3. DISCUSS AND RATE PERFORMANCE FOR EACH DUTY**

- Cover all information: the job duties, criteria for those duties, and how you see the employee.
- Seek participation.
- Build on useful suggestions.
- Look for mutual agreements when possible.
- Add relevant information.
- Participate.
- Build on useful suggestions.
- Look for mutual agreements when possible.

**4. DISCUSS AND WRITE DOWN WAYS TO IMPROVE PERFORMANCE**

- Seek suggestions and alternatives.
- Encourage participation.
- Build on useful suggestions.
- Look for mutual agreements when possible.
- Prepare an individual plan of action if the EPRS rating is Unsatisfactory.
- Make suggestions.
- Participate.
- Build on useful suggestions.
- Look for mutual agreements when possible.





**Supervisor****Employee****5. DISCUSS AND RATE OVERALL PERFORMANCE**

- |                                           |                                |
|-------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| • Encourage participation.                | • Participate.                 |
| • Be concise and clear.                   | • Be concise and clear.        |
| • Discuss your rating with the employees. | • Ask relevant questions.      |
| • Check for understanding.                | • Supply relevant information. |

**6. UPDATE DUTIES AND CRITERIA**

- |                                |                                |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| • Cover all known information. | • Share all known information. |
| • Seek participation.          | • Participate.                 |
| • Clarify specific changes.    | • Seek clarifications.         |
| • Detail responsibilities.     |                                |
| • Check for understanding.     |                                |

**7. DISCUSS AND WRITE DOWN AN EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT PLAN AT THE EMPLOYEE'S REQUEST**

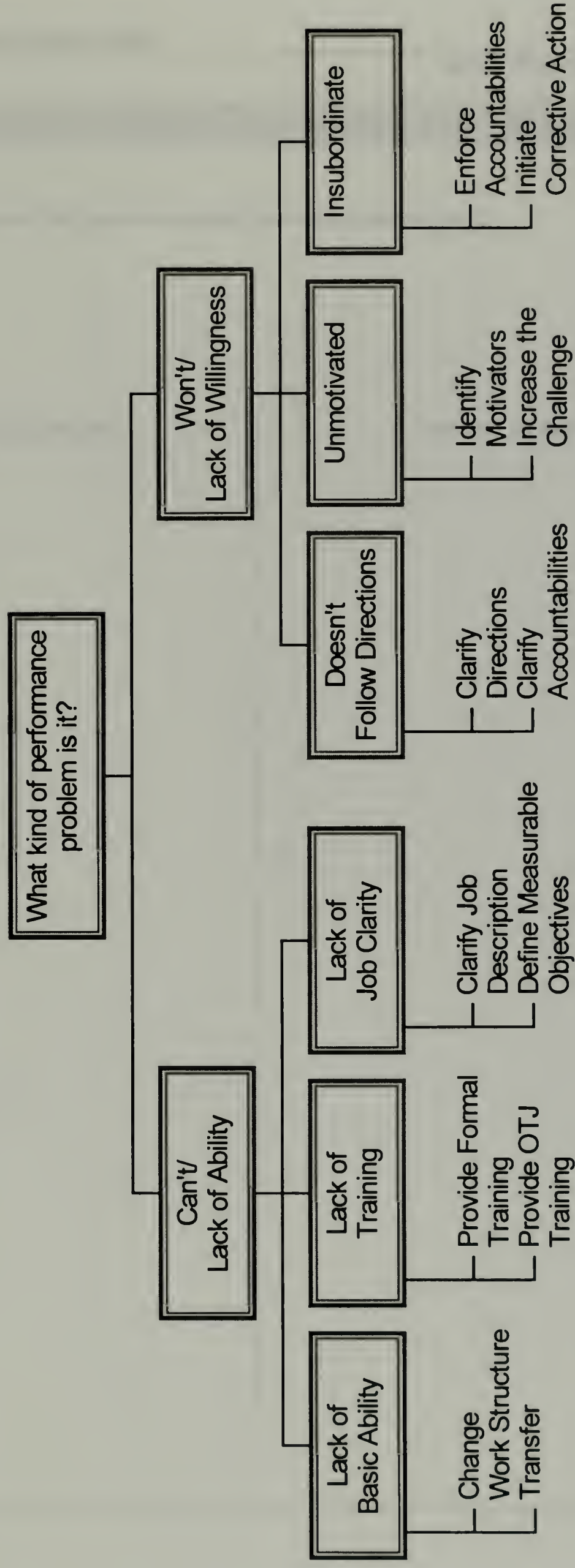
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|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| • Discuss benefits of a plan.                                                        | • Share professional goals.                |
| • Encourage discussion about types of development activities.                        | • Explore types of development activities. |
| • Review the Employee's goals.                                                       |                                            |
| • Listen and clarify for understanding why the Employee wants a plan, if applicable. |                                            |

**8. SIGN THE FORM**

- |                                                 |                              |
|-------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| • Explain what the signatures mean.             | • Clarify understanding.     |
| • Spell out next steps and set follow-up dates. | • Be clear about next steps. |
| • Summarize the session.                        |                              |
| • Refocus on the positive.                      |                              |



# Diagnosing Performance Problems





## EPRS Case Study

**Problem Statement:** My intention during this conversation was...

**Spoken Dialogue**

**Internal Dialogue**





## EPRS CASE WORKSHEET

**Situation:** Briefly describe your understanding of the current situation.

As we cover various communication topics today, you will be asked to write down any learnings which might be relevant to this situation. At the end of the day you will have an opportunity to practice what you have learned and develop an action plan for next steps.

**Communication Process:**

**Communication Styles:**

**Evaluating Performance:**

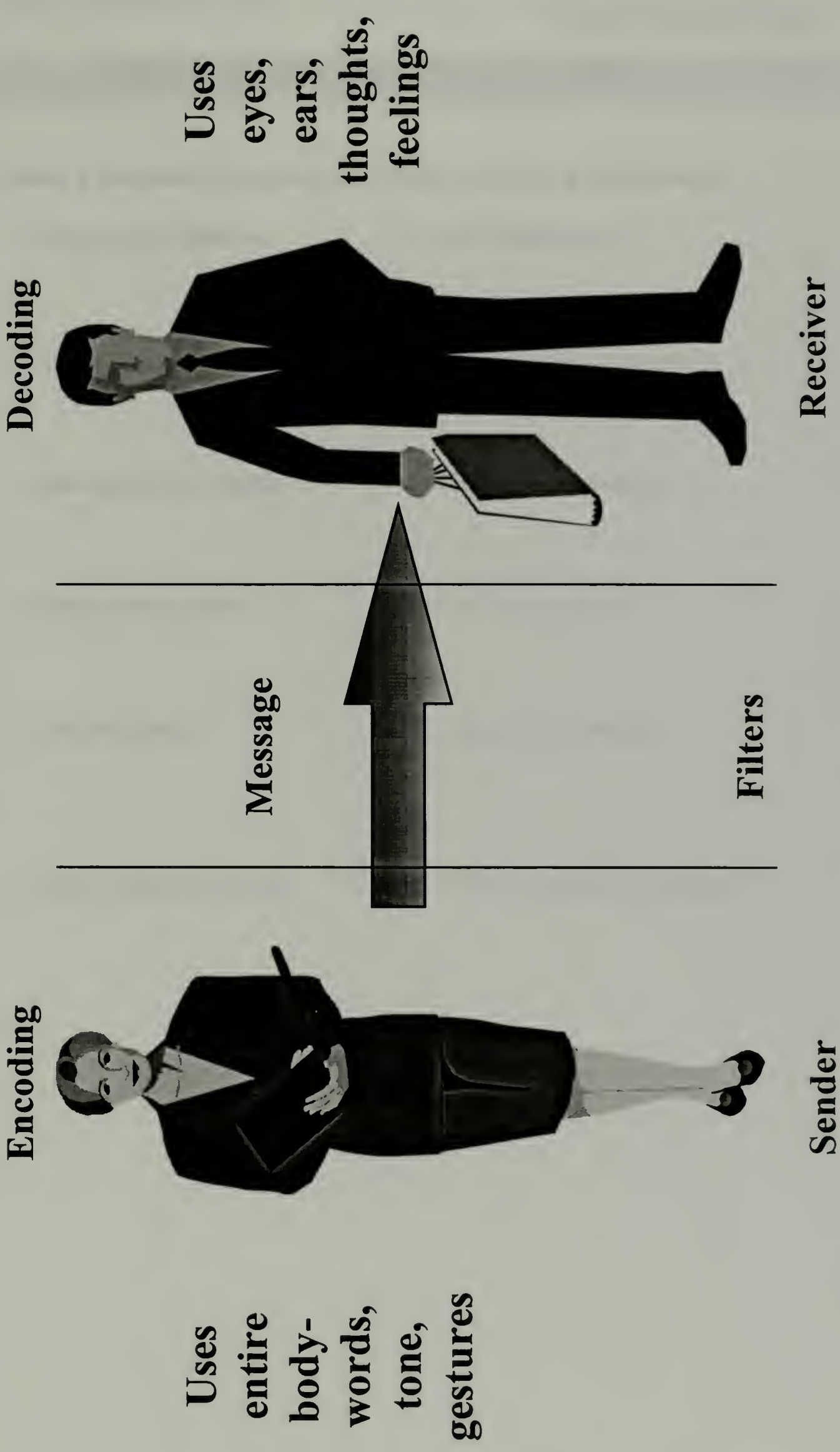
**Performance Feedback:**

**Reducing Differences:**





# COMPONENTS OF COMMUNICATION





## COMMUNICATION STYLES SELF-TEST

Select a statement from each pair which most closely describes you.

- |    |                                 |                                  |
|----|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| A. | 1. I ask a lot of questions.    | 2. I tell it like it is.         |
| B. | 1. I prefer to work on my own.  | 2. I prefer to work with others. |
| C. | 1. I am supportive of others.   | 2. I like to take initiative.    |
| D. | 1. I am a private person.       | 2. I am very sociable.           |
| E. | 1. I am very gabby.             | 2. I tend not to speak up.       |
| F. | 1. I like to keep to the facts. | 2. I like to express my opinion. |



**COMMUNICATION STYLES SELF-TEST****Scoring****Other Directed**

A1

B2

C1

**Self Directed**

A2

B1

C2

**Less Expressive**

D1

E2

F1

**More Expressive**

D2

E1

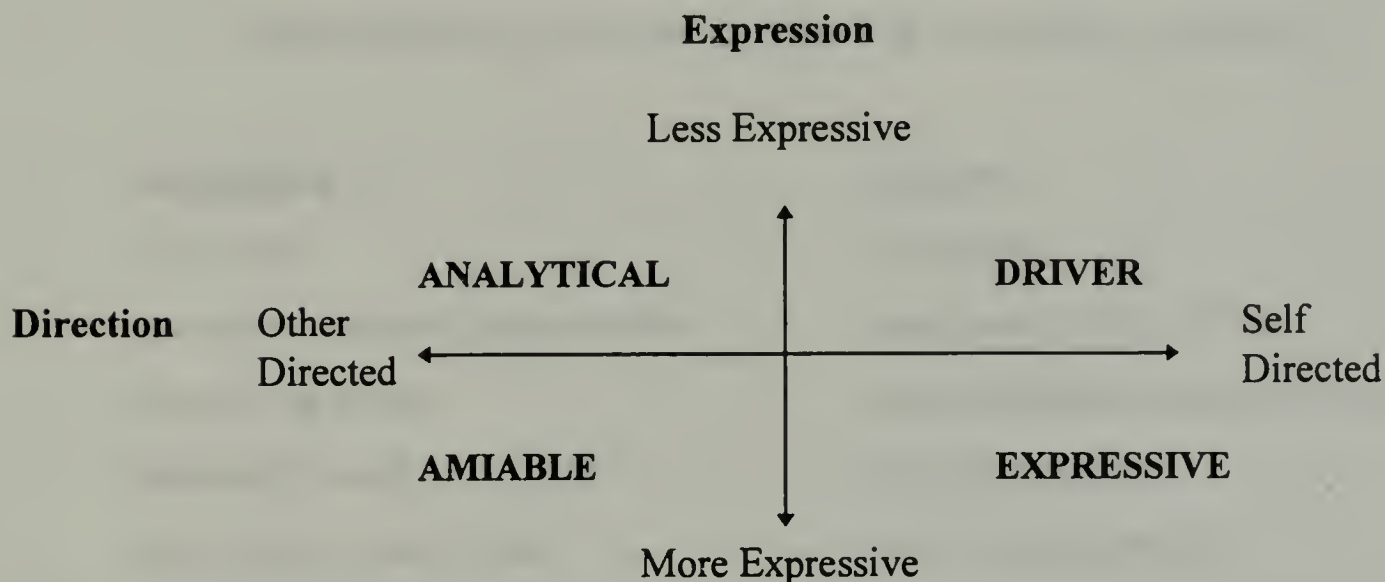
F2





## COMMUNICATION STYLES

### The Style Axis



#### Other directed person is likely to:

ask questions  
be cooperative  
let others take the initiative  
play it safe  
be supportive

#### Self directed person is likely to:

make statements  
work on their own  
take initiative  
take risks  
be competitive

#### Less expressive person is likely to:

use facts  
be independent  
be business-like  
be private

#### More expressive person is likely to:

use opinions  
be approachable  
be impulsive  
be sociable

Every person has a preferred style  
Each style has strengths and weaknesses  
Different styles are effective in different situations  
A person's style may change depending on the situation





**COMMUNICATION STYLES****Communicating in Type**

When presenting, influencing, explaining, or trying to understand:

**Analyticals**

be factual  
document successful applications  
reduce risk factors  
thoroughly work out details  
show why it makes sense

**Drivers**

be logical  
state principles involved  
stress competent handling of issues  
be well organized  
list costs and benefits

**Amiables**

tell who else is for the idea  
be personable and friendly  
indicate how it's helpful  
say it's the "right" thing to do  
tell why it's valuable

**Expressives**

give global scheme  
don't let opportunity pass  
use confidence and enthusiasm  
indicate challenges  
point out future benefits



## EVALUATING PERFORMANCE

### PERFORMANCE EXPECTATIONS

Are the performance expectations clear? Do the performance criteria describe the “average” employee’s performance?

### SUPERVISION/MONITORING NEEDED

How much supervision/monitoring does the employee need to accomplish the assigned job duties?

### CONSISTENT PATTERN

Is there a consistent pattern to the employee’s performance?

### WITHIN THE EMPLOYEE’S CONTROL

Are there problems beyond the employee’s control keeping the employee from getting the work done right?

### DUE TO EMPLOYEE’S EFFORT/ABILITY

Is the positive or negative results/impact of the employee’s work performance due to the employee’s own effort or ability? Is there some skill or information the employee needs to learn to do the job better?





**THE GOURMET COOKING APPROACH TO FEEDBACK**

**Know Your Diner** Personalize to suit the tastes of the diner. Is she/he a vegetarian, or partial to hearty Italian or spicy Cajun food? Mass produced TV dinners are a no no:

The style of communication which you use with one person is not necessarily appropriate for another. Some respond well to an informal comment about their performance and others prefer a more formal exchange. Some like to stick to business, others prefer to feel a personal connection.

**Select Fresh Ingredients** While “day old bread” may be acceptable in some circumstances, stale food loses it’s nutritional value:

Feedback is most useful when given as close as possible to the behavior which elicits it. Sometimes it is necessary to pause long enough to compose your thoughts and feelings, but the shorter the delay the less distortion will occur and the more relevant the feedback will be.

**Don’t Starve or Overfeed Diners** Waiting too long between feedings makes the meal a shock to the system, just as overeating makes it hard to digest:

Frequently people complain that the only time they get feedback is at an annual review when they get too much information to deal with. Establish a relationship in which feedback in both directions is on-going.

**Prepare A Healthy, Well-Balanced Meal** Keep all toxic substances out of the kitchen as well as the dining room. Plan a nutritious meal with a variety of textures and colors - no mess hall trash:

The purpose of feedback is to support and improve the efforts of people, not to dump on people you don’t like. Separate out any feelings of yours which do not directly relate to the person’s performance. Think about the range of activities performed and not just the high or low lights.

**Appetizer** The appetizer set the tone for the rest of the meal and should be something special to get the diner’s attention:

Avoid setting up a “yes, but...” situation by giving the opening impression that everything is terrific if it isn’t. Try to find an example of work which exemplifies both strengths and weaknesses.



**Main Dish** Be sure it is served at the appropriate temperature-not too hot and not too cold. Cut entree into small, digestible pieces:

Be careful not to over/under react to particular aspects of someone's performance. Maintenance activities are as important as special projects. Identify specific examples of behaviors which illustrate what you want or don't want.

**Dessert** Dessert should complement the meal-not too sweet nor filled with empty calories. It should leave the diner with a good taste in his/her mouth:

If it was a tough meeting, acknowledge it. Identify any outstanding issues and next steps.

**Provide Napkins and Toothpicks** Just in case the diner needs to remove embarrassing telltale signs of a meal or would like to enjoy their version of an aftermeal smoke, provide an opportunity to freshen up before leaving:

Regardless of how well all of the above goes, each person could probably benefit from a few minutes alone either to think about information that was hard to hear and /or revel over a job well done.

**Overall, two principles must be kept in mind:**

**The meal is prepared to best suit the needs of the diner, not the chef.**

**And you want to encourage diners to come back for more.**





**REDUCING DIFFERENCES:  
SIX POINTS ABOUT HUMAN NATURE TO REMEMBER  
WHEN IN DIFFICULT SITUATIONS**

- Point #1:**     **We're often our Difficult Person's Difficult Person.** We are collaborators in these Difficult Situations. It takes two to dance.
- Point #2:**     **Difficult People can come bringing gifts...** but first we must stop viewing their actions as personal affronts.
- Points #3:**    **We can't change other people,** but we can change our behaviors so that we LEAD the dance...instead of following. The other person MIGHT model your new behaviors.
- Point #4:**     **People do things for their reasons, not yours.** And they feel justified in doing so, no matter how irrational their actions may seem to us and no matter how good are our motivations and intentions.
- Point #5:**     **Knowledge is power.** We can protect ourselves by learning as much about their motivations and fears as possible. Gain knowledge through powerful communication skills.
- Point #6:**     **Understand you are not being personally attacked.** Separate the person from their behavior. Listen, ask questions, and provide feedback.



## **TOOLS TO REDUCE DIFFERENCES**

### **MAKE DIFFERENCES EXPLICIT AND ACCURATE**

- Ask questions to clarify
- Reflect what you hear the other person say
- Check out assumptions
- Use examples and data to be specific
- Check needs and feelings
- Acknowledge how the other person sees the situation
- Outline key issues, specific problems
- Deal with one key point at a time
- Set standards for evaluating
- Ask other person to reflect and paraphrase what you've discussed

### **INTEGRATE AND ENHANCE THE RELATIONSHIP**

- Be flexible to new information which may have changed the situation
- Separate areas of agreement from disagreement
- Establish mutual long and short range goals
- Establish action plans
- Together list agreements
- Establish meeting to measure progress
- Check out the relationship



## DESC MODEL

A Four step program for more successful interactions

(Spaces are for your script)

**DESCRIBE** in objective terms the behavior the employee has been displaying that you want to encourage or discourage.

**EXPRESS** the way you feel about performance.

**SPECIFY** your expectations. Clearly state expectations by reviewing job duties, performance criteria and current priorities.

**CONSEQUENCES** Identify what rewarding consequences you or the job itself will provide the employee for meeting performance expectations. If necessary, specify action plan for employee to follow to improve performance.







## ANALYZING THE SOUNDNESS OF YOUR SCRIPT

Your **DESCRIBE** lines:

- Does your description clarify the situation, or does it just complicate it? Replace all terms that do not objectively describe the behavior that you are evaluating. Be specific.
- Have you described specific job performance, or are you delivering a long list of grievances or vague praise? Focus on one well-defined behavior or problem you want to deal with now. One grievance per script is generally the best approach.
- Have you made the mistake of describing the other person's attitude, motives, intentions? Avoid mind reading and psychoanalyzing. Describe, do not interpret or judge.
- Revise your **DESCRIBE** lines now, if necessary.

Your **EXPRESS** lines:

- Have you acknowledged your feelings and opinions as your own, without blaming the other person or taking credit for their performance? Avoid words that ridicule, shame or embarrass the other person. Swear words and insulting labels (dumb, cruel, selfish, racist, idiotic, boring) very likely will provoke defensiveness and arguments.
- Have you expressed your feelings and thoughts in a positive new way? Avoid your "old phonograph record" lines that your employee is tired of hearing and automatically turns off.
- Have you kept the wording low-key? Aim for emotional restraint, not dramatic impact.
- Revise your **EXPRESS** lines now, if necessary.



**Your SPECIFY lines:**

- Have you clearly stated your expectations regarding the job duties and performance criteria that you are using for evaluating this employee?
- Does the employee understand what successful performance looks like?
- Have you identified current performance priorities that are being performed by average employees?
- Have you clearly described how the employee exceeded expectations?
- If the employee needs to improve their performance, have you proposed a change in behavior that is reasonable and achievable?
- Are you clearly expressing your intention?
- Are you prepared to alter your own behavior if your employee asks you to change? What are you prepared to change about your behavior?
- What counter proposals do you anticipate and how well will you answer them?
- Revise your **SPECIFY** lines now, if necessary.

**Your CONSEQUENCES lines:**

- Have you stressed positive, rewarding consequences for continuing to meet or exceed expectations?
- When appropriate, have you identified positive consequences for improving job performance?
- If necessary, have you identified negative consequences for not improving job performance?
- Is the action plan clear and realistic?
- Is the reward you selected really appropriate for the employee? Painting the big picture of how their performance effects others is often useful in describing positive as well as negative consequences.
- Can you realistically carry through these consequences?
- Revise your **CONSEQUENCES** lines now, if necessary.





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**PARTICIPANT ACTION PLAN**

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Based upon your learning experience today, develop an **Action Plan** for more successful communication regarding your difficult situation. **Identify the appropriate communication style that will work most effectively with that individual.** The most important characteristic of an action plan is that it is written so that you and the other person will know when the action has occurred. **Action Plans start with an action verb.**

**PARTICIPANT DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

1. **The skills I will continue to improve:**
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. **The techniques I will put into practice:**
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. **The concepts I found most useful:**





**CASE STUDIES****Example #1**

You are Jay Johnson, an employee with the Department. In June, your supervisor, Chris Clark, talked to you about driving too fast. You said you would do a better job, but it seems that whenever you drive safely some other employee chews you out for taking it easy and taking too long to respond. On August 15, Chris talked to you again about your driving--this time in the office. You said you'd improve. But the same thing keeps happening. It seems that if you drive safely, someone yells at you for not being there soon enough. This very day the deputy chief was in your area and told you personally to get somewhere "on the double"! So you hit the gas and started moving fast. You almost lost it going around a corner, and as luck would have it, who was there but Chris Clark--just in a position to see you. Chris radioed you and said to come to the office, and you're on your way there now. You're probably going to get chewed out but good. You want to do a good job but it seems as if they won't let you. If you drive slowly and safely, they yell about being there sooner--if you drive fast, they yell about safety. What do these people want anyway?



**CASE STUDIES****Example #2**

Stella has served as an employment counselor for the Department of Education for the past two years. This is her twelfth year in the Department. Overall, she is a fine worker. She is extremely accurate and becomes quite concerned when an occasional small error is found. She is service oriented, frequently going out of her way to help clients find additional services they might need while they are unemployed. Although the paper is a burden (and the least desirable part of the job), she nearly always gets it done. Because she works so hard at accomplishing her goals each month and doing things “right,” she becomes exasperated with the lack of support in the building. When the pressure is really on and her frustration level is high, Stella will take it out on clients and other staff. At such times you would typically see her become defensive and impatient. Her voice becomes louder and her words harsher. In dealing with clients, she is likely to scold them for things they haven’t done correctly and to discourage them from asking for services or information that will add to her time burden. As her supervisor, you have received a number of calls from clients complaining about Stella’s actions. When you talk with Stella, she usually acknowledges that she was a little heavy-handed but lets you know how frustrating the situation was or how abusive the client was. Recently Stella has been tighter than a guitar string. Three incidents in the last month have caused you alarm.





